

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA December 29, 2013

Matthew 2; Isaiah 63; Galatians 4

Protecting a Plan

1. **Protection Given**
2. **No Surprise**
3. **The Plans**

Hymns: 42 – 366

Distribution: *Gathered 'Round Your Table* - 58

Closing: 57

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

“When the time had fully come.” Those words would make you think that all was set; that everything was just right; that everything would go smoothly. The world was ready. The people were ready. God was ready. The time had fully come, Paul says, so God sent Jesus into the world.

What happened as soon as Jesus came into the world? The Gospel from Matthew tells us that as soon as Jesus came into the world, he was attacked. Herod the Great, the king who was set on the throne of Israel by the Roman government, heard from Wise Men that a new ruler for Israel had been born a few months earlier. And filled with insecurity, he viewed a newborn baby as a threat to his position of power that he enjoyed so much. So, in order to do away with this newborn king, a foolish and short-sighted decree went out from the king: Every male in the vicinity of Bethlehem under the age of two would be put to death. It would’ve worked, Jesus would’ve been cast under that broad net that Herod was throwing out.

So God would act. He would send Joseph and Mary and Jesus to live in the land of Egypt, far away from the threat of Herod, in a place where he would be protected.

It is obvious why God would do this, isn’t it? This was his Son, whom he loved. And, he had great plans for this Son, plans that would not be corrupted by Herod, plans that would not be destroyed by Satan, plans that would follow God’s timeline.

It should come as no surprise to us this morning that God would protect his Son; that God would protect his plan. After all, this wasn’t the first time that God had stepped in to protect his Son, and the promise and plans that accompanied him.

If we look again at our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 63, the prophet sends out that exact reminder. The nation of Israel was God’s Son. They were his chosen people. Over the years, Israel had gotten into trouble too many times to count. Through arrogance and greediness, through complacency and laziness, through rebellion and idolatry, Israel had found seemingly every way to cause trouble for themselves and, in turn, to cause trouble for God, their Father.

What did God do when his son, Israel, found trouble. He acted. In fact, much of the Old Testament reads as a history of the many and miraculous ways in which God delivered his son, protecting and preserving Israel in ways that are too numerous for us to even begin to list today.

Why would God continue to do this? Isaiah tells us in our first lesson: It was done *“according to his compassion and many kindnesses...In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.”* Israel was God’s Son, whom he loved. He had plans for this son, plans that would not be deterred by disobedience, plans that would not be crushed by captivity, plans that would follow God’s timeline.

As we look through Scripture, we can only marvel at the loving care and protection that God gave to his sons, Israel first, then Jesus. And those great works of God were done to protect a plan, a plan that Paul lays out for us today in Galatians.

As we look at that plan, it’s important to first note that this plan of God was focused on people who were not God’s sons. In fact, they were people who actually stood in opposition to God and his sons. They were a terrible group of rebels. In writing to Titus, Paul described these people this way, *“They were, foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. They lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another”* (Titus 3:3).

In Ephesians, he added this description, stating that all they cared about was *“gratifying the cravings of their sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.”* They were by nature objects of wrath, enemies of God and hostile to all of his plans and promises. They didn’t care about God, they only cared about themselves (Ephesians 2:3). They were heathens; certainly not God’s sons.

That is what makes the plan that God had so unbelievable. According to God’s plan, he wanted those terrible people as his sons. Though they wanted nothing to do with God, God wanted everything to do with them. It made no sense, but this was God’s plan.

Most remarkably, he would use his sons, Israel and Jesus, to make his plan happen. In miraculous, astonishing, unlikely ways, God would use his son

Israel to carry out his great plan to adopt new sons. He would deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt. He would guide Israel in conquest of a homeland. He would make Israel into a great nation. He would even keep Israel alive through their own bouts of disobedience, rebellion and captivity.

Why would God do all this? So Israel could bring Jesus, the Son of God, into the world.

When Jesus finally came into the world as a human child, God would love and care for and protect his Son. But eventually, God's plan called for him to give up his only Son from eternity. He would give him up to the struggles and temptations of human life. He would give him up to the sufferings and death of crucifixion. He would give him up to the hopelessness and despair of abandonment by God.

Why would he allow his Son to go through this? To make us, those rebellious, terrible sinners, his sons.

“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:4). All the plans that God had for Israel and Jesus; all the protection he gave to them; all the pain he put them through; it was for you and me. It was for every person in this world that is by nature a sinner and enemy of God, because it was those people that God wanted as his sons.

It is a humbling thought to look through the pages of the Old Testament and consider that all which God did for Israel, he actually did for you and me. It is even more humbling to look through the Gospels and consider that all which God did for Jesus, and all that he allowed to happen to Jesus, he actually did for you and me.

It's humbling - and I'm sure that you share this sentiment with me - it's humbling because I know that I'm not worth it.

Who are we that God would shape history for us? Who are we that God would give up his Son for us? Who are we? We are people who continue to sin against and disrespect God; we are people who continue to chase after our desires and cravings; we are people who continue to be foolish and disobedient. And yet, still, we are his sons - sons for whom he has done so much to make his own.

As his adopted sons, we now experience all the care and protection that we have seen God give to his natural sons. Paul tells us, ***“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father,”*** (Galatians 4:6). The Spirit who guides, who strengthens, who protects God's sons is living in us, caring for our needs and watching over us each and every day as we go through life. God sends his Spirit now to us, to

ensure that have the protection and care that is afforded to God's sons.

We also get to share in the promises that God gives to his sons. Paul says, ***“So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”*** That is really what God's plan is all about. He wanted sons for eternity. He wanted sons to share the joys of heaven with him. And being an heir ensures that we will do just that. The Father cares, the Father protects, the Father promises, the Father fulfills; this is what he does for his sons; this is what he does for us.

That we would be sons of God was the plan that God made, even before the creation of the world. That we would be sons of God was the plan that God protected, throughout the course of human history. That we would be the sons of God is the plan that God carries out, in us right here today. Amen.